

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Scott Wilderman and I am the President and CEO of Career Resources, Inc. I want to testify tonight about the importance of creating a Justice Reinvestment fund from the savings recognized by the closing of Willard Correctional Facility. With the closing of this facility, we have the unique opportunity to reinvest the \$6.5 million through the creation of a justice reinvestment fund under DOC. The goal of this fund would be to design and implement innovative, data-driven, and comprehensive approaches to reduce crime, cut recidivism rates, and direct resources toward more cost-effective safety strategies.

Some of the strategies that we are encouraging the state to invest in are the Reentry Welcome Centers, Hang-Time and iBest Second Chance Programming. You will hear tonight from several participants of these programs and you will learn first-hand how these innovative and data driven initiatives improved their chances at successful reintegration, while reducing recidivism and making the community safer.

The Reentry Welcome Center concept started about three years ago with the launch of the Hartford site. The welcome centers are a fairly new initiative as they play an integral role between DOC and the community. The centers serve as a the main hand-off point from DOC to the community thus avoiding the negative stigma of a person being dropped in the middle of downtown or on a green with no resources available to them. These centers have trained community personnel that provide individual intake and referrals, with everything from housing assistance, behavioral health, medical services to employment and job training. Most of the participants are considered End of Sentence (EOS), meaning that they have served their full sentence with DOC and are no longer under DOC custody. The current funding for these centers is volatile as they are funded mostly through private philanthropy and/or ARPA dollars that will be sunseting next year. Preliminary data from those that have come through the center is very encouraging as recidivism rates with some centers showing less than a 5%. Collectively, these centers assist over 1,000 returning citizens annually. Without stable funding for these

centers, EOS clients would not have any formal place to go and are more likely to recidivate as they flounder for resources to survive. Therefore we are asking that the state invest \$5 million to fully fund these five centers.

Hang Time was created and launched as a grassroots effort to foster community and give voice to men and women (ex-offenders/returning citizens) who have been silent—or unheard—for far too long. The targeted group are those involved with gang/group violence and those that inherently suffer from Post-Traumatic & Present Stress Disorder (PTSD) resulting from urban gun violence. It's a two-hour long gathering once every week in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury, over 3000 people have participated in Hang-Time. The unlikely brotherhood and sisterhood of ex-offenders, legal and community leaders grows stronger each week as they all come together for a meal and group conversation. The environment is always welcoming and an informal forum for discussion. These free-flowing discussions run the gamut, covering topics from politics, race relations, economics, cultural diversity, as well as ways to conduct oneself during an encounter with the police. Hang-Time has been embraced as a best practice model and is now being launched in other states. Currently funding for Hang Time and its affiliated programs comes through private donations, therefore we are requesting \$500K be set aside for this critical initiative.

Finally, we have the Second Chance Integrated Basic Education Skills Training (i-Best). Currently the program is partially funded by the state for around \$300K in the Department of Labor Budget. We are urging the state to increase funding for this initiative by \$500K as it was once funded at \$1.27 million. The iBest Program is demonstrably successful in helping to meet the talent needs of participating employers and does a remarkable job at reintegrating individuals back into society. Over a three year period a total of 405 returning citizens have been enrolled in this program with 300 receiving an industry based credential and 303 entering into employment with an 84% job retention rate Best Second Chance Program.

In closing, we hope that the state will consider funding these important initiatives through the creation of a Justice Reinvestment Fund. We know that by supporting these data driven programs we will be able to decrease

recidivism and enhance family reunification as we make our communities safer and families stronger.